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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 004402

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SUBJECT: (C) GOI OFFICIALS ARE TALKING TO HAMAS MAYORS

Classified By: Ambassador Daniel C. Kurtzer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Israeli Defense Force officers are communicating with Hamas mayors in the Palestinian territories on routine matters, although it is unclear whether these contacts are direct or through other Palestinian intermediaries. Post has asked the Ministry of Justice whether the GOI has any laws or regulations governing contact with Hamas; MOJ has forwarded that request to MFA. End Summary.

Dealing With Realities on the Ground

¶2. (C) Amos Gilad (protect), head of the Political-Military Bureau in the Ministry of Defense, told Econcouns in late June that field commanders under the Coordinator for Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) are dealing with Hamas mayors on a regular basis. He could not provide details of the mechanism for communication, stating that regardless of the official policy, "work has to get done and is getting done."

¶3. (C) In a more recent meeting MOD advisors, Baruch Spiegel (protect) and Netzach Mashiach (protect) told Econcouns that IDF field staff are reporting that many of the Hamas-affiliated mayors are doing a good job. The officials commented that Hamas officials are "not coming to work with guns" and are taking their responsibilities seriously.

¶4. (C) Lt Col. Daniel Beaudoin of COGAT (protect) told acting Econcouns July 6 that while COGAT is aware of which mayors are Hamas or "close to Hamas," COGAT continues to work with those mayors on routine matters. According to Beaudoin, COGAT field staff treat all mayors as technocrats and deal with them on COGAT's issues, regardless of political affiliation.

¶5. (C) Yair Hirschfeld of the Economic Cooperation Foundation, who deals regularly with a range of Palestinians, told acting Econcouns July 6 that the GOI does not/not have any specific legal prohibitions on contact between Israeli citizens and Hamas.

¶6. (C) In a recent conversation, Major General "Haki" Harel, IDF Chief of Planning Branch, told DAO that the IDF and COGAT do not directly interface with Hamas officials, particularly those recently elected to local city councils in the West Bank and Gaza. He said when issues require coordination with local Hamas controlled councils the IDF and the COGAT indirectly coordinate through other (non-Hamas) Palestinian contacts. (Note: This appears to be the "official" internal IDF policy; the other reports above indicate that direct contact is taking place. End note). Another contact, a former COGAT advisor on Arab Affairs said that, at times, the IDF will ask that a Palestinian Authority official be present to provide "cover" during meetings with Hamas officials.

¶7. (C) Post has asked the Ministry of Justice whether the GOI has any laws or regulations prohibiting contact with Hamas. MOJ has passed the inquiry to the MFA for response.

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